

SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

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ACCREDITING The widespread interest and concern of members of the Council in current accrediting developments pointed to the desirability of devoting one issue of Social Work Education to this subject. The focus will be on the nature and background of social work accrediting with special emphasis on the role of the Council on Social Work Education in effectively relating the accrediting process in social work to institution-wide accrediting conducted under the auspices of regional accrediting associations.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT Social work education has used a process of accreditation since 1927, when the American Association of Schools of Social Work established requirements for membership. Formal accrediting procedures were not initiated, however, until 1932. In this same period, the American Association of Medical Social Workers and the American Association of Psychiatric Social Workers engaged in accrediting activities in relation to their particular specializations. By 1951, the accrediting functions of these professional membership associations as well as the American Association of Group Workers and the National Association of School Social Workers had been assumed by the AASSW, thus bringing under one organization responsibility not only for the accrediting of general programs of social work education but also for the approval of special curricula. While these developments were taking place in the field of professional education, a movement was initiated by a group of undergraduate institutions, organized as the National Association of Schools of Social Administration, to accredit a combination of undergraduate and graduate training for social work. With the establishment of the Council on Social Work Education on July 1, 1952, the undergraduate departments and graduate schools joined forces with other segments of the profession to promote sound programs of education for social work and all responsibility for accrediting has been vested by the Council By-Laws in its Commission on Accreditation. As in other professional fields, the development of accrediting standards and procedures in social work was initiated by the schools themselves. Over the years, however, a certain legal status has been attached to this function by federal, state, and local agencies through legislation, rules and regulations governing the employment of personnel.

COMMISSION ON ACCREDITATION The Commission on Accreditation, with Mr. John C. Kidneigh, Director of the University of Minnesota School of Social Work as Chairman, is composed of fifteen members. The By-Laws provide that the membership of the Commission shall include nine full-time faculty members of graduate schools of social work; three members who are in a responsible and official relationship to the professional education work of the membership associations; and three persons selected from any of the four membership groups of the Council who, by reason of their experience and interest, may be expected to contribute valuable counsel. The membership of the Commission for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1953, was:

Terms Ending June 30, 1953: Mark Hale, University of Missouri; Marjorie Smith, University of British Columbia; Sue Spencer, University of Tennessee; Grace White, New York State University, School of Medicine; John Dula, Westchester County Council of Social Agencies.

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Terms Ending June 30, 1955: Florence Day, Smith College; John C. Kidneigh, University of Minnesota; Clara Kaiser, Columbia University; Ewald B. Nyquist, University of the State of New York and Secretary, Middle States Association; Elizabeth H. Ross, U. S. Children's Bureau.

COMMISSION ACTIVITIES The Commission has held four meetings in the course of the present fiscal year. Within this brief period, it has produced a statement of general standards for accrediting schools of social work and a detailed manual that spells out the standards and outlines accrediting procedures; it has established fruitful relationships with national and regional accrediting groups; and it has taken action on a number of applications for change in accredited status or approval of special programs.

GENERAL STANDARDS The statement of general standards prepared by the Commission was adopted by the Council of Delegates at its annual meeting on June 4 in Cleveland. This statement sets forth, in broad outline, the purposes of accrediting and the standards which are applied in the examination and evaluation of a school of social work. This statement is available without charge as a general guide to educational institutions interested in the possible establishment of a graduate program in social work and, at cost, to other interested groups.

ACCREDITING MANUAL "The Manual of Accrediting Standards" states and describes the criteria and procedures used in evaluating professional programs of social work education and certain specialized sequences within those programs. The emphasis throughout is on qualitative not quantitative measurement, on the achievement of high standards not standardization of educational programs. The Manual represents a distillation of the tested experience of the AASSW and incorporates the data accumulated over the years that make possible the use of qualitative standards. It should serve not only as a guide in the evaluation of new programs but also as a stimulus to self-appraisal and self-improvement on the part of all schools of social work. It should provide authoritative information on educational goals and standards for all membership groups in the Council - - - for employing agencies participating in the field work instruction of social work students, for membership associations in their work on professional standards, for undergraduate departments preparing students for later professional study, and for representatives of higher education and other professions desiring a better understanding of the nature and content of social work education. The Manual is organized in codified form to permit the addition, as needed, of new or revised criteria and procedures. The price of the Manual has been established at \$10 to cover the cost of the development of the basic data, the production of the publication, and the continuing service to be provided in keeping it up to date. The Manual will be ready for distribution within the near future.

ACCREDITING ACTIONS In its first year of operation, the Commission on Accreditation took favorable action with regard to the following programs:

- (1) The University of Oklahoma School of Social Work and the University of West Virginia School of Social Work, both of which were formerly approved as one-year schools, are now accredited as two-year schools; (2) the group work program has been approved at the Ohio State University School of Social Administration; (3) the medical social work program has been approved at the Worden School of Social Service of Our Lady of the Lake College, and at the Department of Social Work of the University of Montreal; (4) the psychiatric social work program has been approved at the University of Illinois School of Social Work, the Loyola University School of Social Work, the St. Louis University School of Social Service, the University of Toronto School of Social Work, and



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the University of Wisconsin School of Social Work.

ACCREDITED LIST A revised accredited list will be issued during the summer. In addition to the printed list, there will be available for reference purposes a master mimeographed list of all schools that have been accredited by the AASSW and the Council, showing the dates of establishment and discontinuance, the actual and retroactive dates of accreditation of basic programs, and the dates of change in status and approval of specialized programs.

CATALOGUE NOTATIONS Schools of Social Work are advised to distinguish in their catalogues between membership in the Council on Social Work Education and accreditation by its Commission on Accreditation. Some such wording as the following might be used: "The School of Social Work, as well as its specialization(s) in ----, has been approved by the Commission on Accreditation of the Council on Social Work Education. The School is also a constituent member of the Council."

NATIONAL ACCREDITTING DEVELOPMENTS A third major activity of the Commission has encompassed a study of the many implications of new national and regional accrediting developments, particularly as reflected in the activities of the National Commission on Accrediting and the six regional accrediting associations.

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON ACCREDITING The National Commission on Accrediting represents seven national associations of colleges and universities which count some 1200 educational institutions in their membership. The National Commission was organized in 1949 as an outgrowth of the Joint Committee on Accrediting, which was established in 1938 by the state universities and land-grant colleges. The Joint Committee had concerned itself primarily with what it regarded as the evils of accrediting, e.g., too many accrediting bodies, duplication of functions, destruction of institutional rights and powers, excessive costs, superficial quantitative standards, uneven institutional development, detrimental enforcement policies, guild practices, etc. The National Commission, in taking over the concerns of the Joint Committee, launched a study of the practices and procedures of all existing accrediting groups with a view to arriving at a statement of principles that would conserve the values and abolish the evils of accrediting. Two program letters issued recently by the National Commission are of special interest to the social work profession.

PROGRAM LETTER NO. 1 Program Letter No. 1, dated November 7, 1952, directed certain professional organizations, of which the Council on Social Work Education was one, to cease their accrediting activities and to begin immediately to work with the six regional associations towards the use of institution-wide accrediting procedures. The Commission asserted that the regional associations would have assumed, by January 1954, full responsibility for the accrediting of institutions of higher education. This letter also advised the 1200 universities and colleges in the membership of the National Commission to stop accrediting relationships with the stated professional groups and to cease payment of accrediting fees to those organizations.

COUNCIL RESPONSE The Commission on Accreditation of the Council, following study of the intent of the National Commission as well as the specific directives in Program Letter No. 1, took the position that social work would be willing to cooperate in the establishment of mutually satisfactory relationships with the regional associations, but would expect full attention to be given to: (1) the many legal status problems associated with accrediting in social work; (2) the requirements of civil service systems; (3) the requirements of public and private agencies in awarding scholarships and training grants; and (4) the Council's responsibility to Canadian schools. The Commission also pointed out that the effective date of January 1, 1954 was unrealistic because of the different stages of development of the various regional associa-

tions and the necessity for a long period of preparatory work in initiating cooperative procedures. Finally, the Commission asked for clarification of the directive on accrediting fees in order to avoid confusion on the part of universities with respect to the payment of membership dues which are in no way related to accrediting. (A later verbal interpretation of this directive indicates that universities would not be expected to regard as accrediting fees the dues that are paid to professional organizations for the purpose of promoting professional development and professional standards.)

PROGRAM LETTER NO. 3 In Program Letter No. 3, issued in January of this year, the National Commission on Accrediting reaffirmed its basic objectives, principles and original directives. Later interpretation of the letter indicates, however, that steps will be taken in conjunction with the regional associations to work out a suitable time schedule for the advancement of a nationally correlated accrediting program. The setting of a new effective deadline date or some alternative arrangement will be considered by the Executive Committee of the National Commission and the regional associations at a meeting to be held in July.

REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS The Council's Commission on Accreditation proceeded at once to inform itself about and to enter into correspondence with the six regional associations as follows: (1) Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools; (2) New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools; (3) North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools; (4) Northwest Association of Secondary and Higher Schools; (5) Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools; and (6) Western College Association. These six associations are in very different stages of development and in varying stages of readiness to share accrediting responsibility with the Council. All of the associations, however, are now in touch with the Council and have been informed of the nature and purpose of social work accrediting. The Commission has designated a member living in the region concerned to serve as liaison between the Council and the relevant regional accrediting association. The regional associations have organized a National Committee of Regional Accrediting Agencies which has no power to take action but which can promote the development and maintenance of national standards through discussion of common problems, exchange of information, and sharing of experience among the six associations.

EXPERIENCE WITH MIDDLE STATES The experience to date with the Middle States Association indicates that satisfactory agreements can be reached which protect the standards of social work education and at the same time make use of the many benefits of institution-wide accrediting. The Council has already participated with the Middle States Association in reviews of three universities that offer professional education for social work. The following distinct advantages for social work education in this kind of accrediting were noted: (1) the opportunity provided to study a school of social work in its proper relationship to all other schools and departments of the university; (2) the possibility offered for more effective development of schools of social work when recommendations are presented to the top officials of the university and carry the weight and prestige of the regional association as well as the professional organization; (3) the opportunity provided for effective interpretation of social work education to educators in other fields and to other departments of the university through participation of social work educators on evaluation teams; and (4) the opportunity provided for sharing information on problems of general and professional education with leaders in their respective fields and for obtaining assurance that the educational base upon which any profession rests is soundly related to the professional discipline. Certain disadvantages noted by the social work team members in the three reviews were given careful study by the Middle States Association and procedures are being modified in the light of experience to date.

AGREEMENTS The Council on Social Work Education has entered into a formal agreement to cooperate with the Middle States Association in these three ways: (1) by





designating representatives to work with the Association in developing a joint questionnaire which will elicit the specific information needed by the Council in evaluating a school of social work as well as the general information needed by the Middle States Association; (2) by nominating social work educators to be used, as needed, for joint evaluating committees; and (3) by exchanging confidential reports and information. It has been further agreed that the Council will attempt to mesh its studies of new schools with studies conducted by Middle States. However, when this is not possible, or if a delay would work an undue hardship on a new school, the Council will initiate the review upon request of the university and invite a representative of Middle States to participate in the study of the school of social work. Interim or follow-up studies that cannot be scheduled at the time of a Middle States evaluation will be handled in the same way. A tentative agreement to be used as a basis for further cooperative effort has also been reached with the Northwestern Association. It is anticipated that the agreements and procedures that are now being adopted by the Middle States Association and the professional organizations working with it will establish a pattern for constructive cooperative effort that may be followed by the other regional associations.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS Many questions have been raised in regard to this new approach to accrediting. Those most commonly asked are reproduced below with answers based upon our present knowledge and experience.

WHO EXAMINES? There is every assurance that a competent social work educator or educators nominated by the Council on Social Work Education will be assigned to evaluations of every university that offers professional social work education. The Council would not conclude an agreement with any regional association that did not accept this as a basic requirement for cooperative activity.

WHOSE STANDARDS? The standards that have been produced by the Council's Commission on Accreditation will be incorporated into any joint questionnaires developed by the Council and the regional associations. There appears to be consensus that the professional organization must of necessity serve as the standard-setting body for a professional discipline.

WEAK SCHOOL - ACCREDITED UNIVERSITY? If a school of social work is weak or sub-standard, but the university as a whole is accredited by the regional association, will the professional school necessarily be accredited? The Middle States Association has indicated that it would expect to work cooperatively with the professional organization and the university in effecting improvement in a weak unit of the university. If necessary, a time limit could be imposed and the accredited status of the whole university would be placed in jeopardy if improvements were not effected within the specified period.

STRONG SCHOOL - WEAK UNIVERSITY? If a school of social work that meets professional standards is a part of a weak university that cannot be accredited, will the professional school be removed from the accredited list? The "Manual of Accrediting Standards" for schools of social work states that a school seeking accreditation must be an integral part of a recognized college or university. The presumption is that no school of social work can be strong if the college or university of which it is a part is so weak that it cannot be accredited. This represents no change from previous practice.

HOW TO MAINTAIN NATIONAL STANDARDS? National standards can be protected through a requirement in the agreement with each of the six regional associations that the Council on Social Work Education nominate the social work educators to be used on evaluation teams and that the standards developed by the Commission on Accreditation be used in appraising schools of social work. The existence of a National Committee of Regional Accrediting Agencies also offers the hope that

the six associations will work together towards the formulation of common objectives and the development of procedures that will not vary too widely from region to region.

WILL THE COMMISSION'S FUNCTIONS CHANGE? The standard-setting function of the Council's Commission on Accreditation will take on added significance since the standards to be used in appraising a professional school within the context of an all-university review must be developed by the professional organization concerned and must be kept current in the light of developments in the field of practice. The Commission will also have the responsibility of implementing the agreements reached with each of the regional associations and of ensuring the maintenance of uniform national standards.

WHAT OF THE CANADIAN SCHOOLS? The Commission will continue to discharge the accrediting function for the Canadian schools in the same way that it has always done.

WHAT ABOUT THE SPECIALIZATIONS? Until better methods are devised or an alternative arrangement agreed upon, the Commission and its committees on approval of the various specialized programs will continue as in the past to receive written materials and arrive at a judgment on the basis of "paper reviews."

WHO PUBLISHES THE ACCREDITED LIST? The Council on Social Work Education will continue to publish an accredited list. The needs of employing agencies, civil service systems, and persons interested in locating approved schools of social work require that such a list be maintained by the Council. The Middle States Association, in commenting on this question, said: "The Middle States Association is not concerned whether specialized agencies publish their own accredited lists or not. This question is outside the Middle States Association Commission's province. It has no authority or mandate from its membership to absorb the functions of other organizations. The Middle States Association is not an enforcement arm for any organization except its own membership. In seeking the cooperation of professional societies, the Middle States Association is interested only in improving and strengthening evaluation procedures."

DOES THE COUNCIL CHARGE ACCREDITING FEES? Accrediting charges are levied by the Council only upon schools that are visited by a review team for accrediting purposes and these charges are limited to the cost of transportation and maintenance of the team members plus the expense of preparation of the accrediting report. Arrangements for financing the evaluation of a school of social work within the context of an all-university review are handled by the regional association with the university concerned. The membership dues paid to the Council by professional schools, undergraduate departments, professional membership associations, employing agencies, and individuals are not accrediting fees and purchase a wide range of services that bear no direct relation to accrediting. These dues make possible the benefits that come from constant interchange of opinion and experience, from research, consultation service, recruitment campaigns, development of educational standards, preparation of teaching materials, annual program meetings, conferences on special subjects, committee work on many aspects of educational endeavor -- in a word, the myriad activities that characterize the efforts of a young profession to build and maintain a solid educational foundation for its professional practice.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE? The new developments in accrediting hold great promise for the future if they work out in accordance with present expectations. The Council is working carefully and cooperatively with the regional associations and colleagues in other professions to make this experiment a success. Evidence already exists to show that social work education can be strengthened, not weakened, through an accrediting alliance with other professions and general education.

